



Petrarch and the Canon of Neo-Latin Literature

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Petrarch and the Canon of Neo-Latin Literature

Petrarch is the first modern Latin author to demand admission to the canon of great Latin writers. No Latin author of the Renaissance was so explicit about his desire to rival the ancients; no writer after him attempted by quite so heroic a *coup de main* to create works that could stand next to those of Virgil, Livy and Cicero. From his crowning as poet laureate, in imitation of Statius, to the careful shaping of his own legend in his letters, Petrarch declared his obsession with joining the company of the famous dead. However convinced of the cultural depravity of his age, he was equally convinced, at least in his youth, that it was still possible to write immortal poetry and great philosophy in Latin. ‘Rari sunt, fateor, pauci sunt, sed aliqui sunt; quid autem vetat ex paucis fieri?’¹ But the remarkable fact about Petrarch’s subsequent literary fame is that it was the opposite of the fame that he desired to have. While he almost instantly became a classic Italian writer, he ultimately failed to win the same status in Latin literature. It is this failure that I wish to examine here, not only because it tells us something about the evolution of standards in humanistic Latin and changing ideas of canonicity, but also because it tells us something about the new generation of humanists at the beginning of the Quattrocento.

It may sound paradoxical to say that Petrarch was a failure as a Neo-Latin writer. He was widely revered in the Renaissance as the father of modern Latin literature and the diffusion of his Latin works in manuscript was impressive: his Latin writings, among humanists writing at the end of the manuscript age, were second in popularity only to

those of Leonardo Bruni. Furthermore, there are more than twice as many surviving manuscripts of his Latin works as there are of his Italian writings. However, if we look more analytically at the evidence concerning Petrarch's reception in the Renaissance, a different picture emerges. As the *Censimento dei codici petrarcheschi*, catalogues of early printed books and other sources reveal, Petrarch's reputation as a Latin writer peaks in Italy around 1400; later, until the end of the fifteenth century, his Latin writings, and especially his moral writings, were much better known outside of Italy than within Italy.²

Outside Italy, Petrarch's reputation was that of a Christian moral philosopher. Jean de Montreuil around 1407 describes him as 'a most devout catholic and very famous moral philosopher', and Nicholas Mann has observed the amusing but significant error in some north European manuscripts of the Quattrocento, which refer to Petrarch as 'Franciscus Patriarca'.³ Sottili's catalogue shows that at least one work of Peter Damian was often attributed to Petrarch.⁴ Outside of Italy his most popular work by far was the *De remediis utriusque fortune*; this work was much more widely circulated outside of Italy than inside. For Northern Europe and Spain in the fifteenth century Petrarch was essentially the author of the *De remediis*. In Italy during the same Quattrocento Petrarch's volgare love poetry was far better known than his Latin writings, while the Italian works were not widely read outside of Italy before the very end of the fifteenth century. With a few exceptions, most translations of Petrarch's vernacular works into other European vernaculars were made in the sixteenth century.⁵

In general the works Petrarch was most famous for in Renaissance Italy were the works he wished least to be famous for, and vice versa. Petrarch of course affected to despise his writings in Italian, his *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, his 'bits of stuff in the

vulgar tongue'. He placed his Latin poetical writings, especially the *Africa* and the *Bucolicum carmen*, at the top of his list of literary achievements, followed by the *De viris illustribus* and his Latin writings on moral philosophy. Of the 'three genres of eloquence' – Latin prose, Latin verse, and rhythmical rhymed verse in the vernacular – the first two were higher, graver, more noble; the last was 'soft', pleasure-oriented, and suited primarily for uneducated ears.⁶ But if we look at the catalogues of Petrarch manuscripts in the Vatican by Vattasso and Pellegrin,⁷ for example, it is clear that Petrarch's valuation of his own works was inverted by that of his readers. Of the circa 250 Petrarch manuscripts in the Vatican (probably about 15-20% of the total number), there are only two of the *Africa*, six of the *Bucolicum carmen*, nine containing one or more of the metrical epistles, and two of the *De viris illustribus*, while there are about 42 of the Latin philosophical works and about 70 manuscripts containing the *Rime* or the *Trionfi*. And if we compare the number of manuscripts of Petrarch's Latin works with the figures for the ancient authors Petrarch admired and imitated, it is clear that he never began to approach them in popularity. There are only 27 surviving manuscripts of the *Africa* for example, while according to Virginia Brown's unpublished data compiled for the *Catalogus Translationum et Commentariorum* there are between six and seven hundred manuscripts of Vergil's *Aeneid*, Petrarch's model, surviving from the Quattrocento alone.⁸ Even when we compare Petrarch to other Latin Renaissance writers, he does not always fare well: manuscripts containing Leonardo Bruni's own Latin writings (as opposed to his translations), for example, outnumber manuscripts of Petrarch's Latin works by nearly three to one.⁹ In the incunabular period, for example, the *Illustrated Incunabula Short-Title Catalogue on CD-ROM* lists 106 imprints of

Agostino Dati's *Elegantiole*, and there are 98 imprints containing Bruni's own Latin writings (excluding his Latin translations from the Greek and vernacular translations of his Latin writings), while there are only 58 imprints of all of Petrarch's Latin works from the same period.

Of course numbers of surviving manuscripts and editions are not the only, or even the best, measure of canonical status: there are plenty of popular writers in every period who never make it into the canon and plenty of canonical writers who never become popular outside schools and universities. Daniel Javitch in his book on Ariosto's canonization proposed some other useful criteria of canonical status, including (1) whether the author has been successfully affiliated with the classical tradition; (2) whether he has been adopted in curricula; (3) whether his works generate commentaries; (4) whether they inspire imitations; and (5) whether they excite wide debate about their meaning.¹⁰ This last criterion, of course, shows that the new author has acquired enough authority to make interpreters want to claim him for their own school or political position. If we look at the evidence for Petrarch's reception in this way, a fairly clear pattern emerges. By Javitch's measures of canonicity, it seems clear that, in Italy, Petrarch was on his way to becoming a medieval Latin classic in the quarter century following his death, but that this process came to a halt in the first decade of the fifteenth century.

Consider, for example, the evidence of the commentaries. Petrarch's Italian writings enjoyed a long and active commentary tradition throughout the Renaissance, beginning with Luigi Marsili in the 1390s and including, in the '400 alone, at least a dozen major commentaries, including commentaries by Francesco Filelfo, Pietro da

Montalcino, Cristoforo Landino, Jacopo di Poggio Bracciolini, Bernardo Illicino, Francesco Patrizi of Siena, Antonio da Tempo, and Bartolomeo Fonzio. His Italian works were commonly the subjects of feast-day lectures at the University of Florence from at least the 1420s. In the case of Petrarch's Latin works, by contrast, we have only Barbato da Sulmona's commentary on part of the *Epistulae familiares* from the 1380s, Benvenuto da Imola's commentary on the *Bucolicon carmen* (1380s), Francesco Piendibeni's 1394 commentary on the same text, the *Epitomata super Bucolicis* of Donato degli Albanzani, probably also from the 1390s, annotations on the *Africa* by Salutati and the Trecento grammarian Pietro da Parma, and Vergerio's verse arguments to the *Africa*, probably written in 1394/95 when his edition of that text was first published. Around 1400 an anonymous editor put together what looks like a school edition of the *Africa* with prose arguments and chapter headings; there survive four manuscripts of this edition, all probably copied in the first decade of the '400.¹¹ After that date there is, to my knowledge, *nothing at all*: not a single commentary was written, not a single lecture was given on the Latin Petrarch anywhere in Renaissance Italy.

The same pattern can be found in imitations and translations of Petrarch. His Italian works, especially the *Rime*, inspire innumerable imitators far into the eighteenth century, first in Italy, then throughout Europe. His Latin works never enjoyed anything like this success. Petrarch's *Bucolicon carmen* was imitated by Jean Gerson and Nicholas of Clémanges in France, and his *De remediis* by Adrianus Carthusiensis. But the last major writers in Italy to imitate Petrarch's Latin writings are Boccaccio and Salutati. The same decline after 1400 can be observed in the case of translations. After the Trecento Italian translations of the *De remediis* by Giovanni da San Miniato and of the *De viris*

illustribus by Donato Albanzani, no Latin works of Petrarch are translated into Italian before Francesco Orlandini translated the *Secret* in 1517.¹² That all this is is not just a new, fifteenth-century prejudice in favor of ancient authors is shown by the very different treatment accorded the Latin writings of Leonardo Bruni, which were anthologized, commented upon, lectured upon, excerpted for handbooks of letter writing, and widely translated into the vernacular; in some cases the vernacular versions of his Latin writings were more popular than the original.¹³

The impression that the years around 1400 were critical for Petrarch's *fortuna* as a Latin writer is further reinforced by a look at the biographical tradition. The lives of Petrarch written before 1400 are remarkable for their lack of restraint in heaping praises on Petrarch's character and writings. They are equally remarkable for their tendency to ignore or downplay Petrarch's contributions to Italian literature. Salutati and Filippo Villani do not hesitate to equate Petrarch's Latin writings with the best of the ancients; for Villani Petrarch's moral philosophy was equal in diction and content to Cicero's and Seneca's, while his (now lost) *Philologia* excelled the best plays of Terence. But Villani was merely echoing Boccaccio. Boccaccio is even more unrestrained: the *Africa* (which Boccaccio had never read) is compared to Homer; Petrarch is called a reincarnation of Homer; his *Epistulae familiares* are said to be not inferior to Cicero's. As at the births of Plato and St. Ambrose, bees made honey on the infant Petrarch's lips. Boccaccio praises Petrarch as temperate, well-dressed, modest, musical, truthful, and most Christian. His only weakness was for women, though this was a weakness which Boccaccio, unsurprisingly, was willing to forgive. The same uncritical note is struck by the other fourteenth-century biographies of the poet. Those written by the Augustinian hermits

Bonaventura di Padova and Pietro da Castaletto even introduce a note of hagiography. While they, too, are convinced that Petrarch's writings deserve to be ranked with the best of the ancients, they describe Petrarch as holy man. In their biographical sketches he becomes an honorary Augustinian hermit, who, watched over by Divine Providence, is able to overcome youthful erotic passions so as to achieve sanctity and ascetic otherworldliness in old age. At his death, according to an anonymous 'friend of truth', a very thin vapor came from his mouth in the form of the whitest cloud, which then ascended to the ceiling and dissipated. This was an obvious miracle, a sign that Petrarch's soul had ascended to heaven.¹⁴

After 1400, we are in a different world. No longer do Petrarch's biographers compare him favorably to ancient authors or to saintly monks. For Bruni, Sicco Polenton, Giannozzo Manetti, Bartolomeo Fonzio, Enea Silvio Piccolomini, Paolo Cortesi, Lilio Giraldi and the later biographical tradition in general Petrarch was an admirable Italian poet who also played a pioneering role in the revival of more serious humanistic studies, though his own Latin writings were second-rate. Manetti is the only biographer who appears on the surface to recommend Petrarch as a literary model, but read more closely his commendation seems diplomatically ambiguous.¹⁵ Sicco Polenton's *Illustrious Writers of the Latin Language* (1426/1437) retails what was to become the orthodox view: that Petrarch was to be revered for his role in awakening interest in good letters, that he was the most eloquent man of his time, but was not to be compared with Cicero or Virgil.¹⁶ Paolo Cortesi's judgment is typical of the later biographical tradition: 'Huius sermo nec est latinus, et aliquanto horridior; sententiae autem multae sunt, sed concisae,

verba abiecta, res compositae diligentius quam elegantius.’ But ‘primus ausus sit eloquentiae studia in lucem revocare.’¹⁷

The sea change can already be detected in Pier Paolo Vergerio’s biography, written just before 1400. The biography is mostly a reworking of Petrarch’s own *Epistola ad posteros*, and thus presents a more modest, if wholly uncritical, picture of the poet. But at the end Vergerio inserts an *apologia* for the *Africa* which is remarkably measured in its judgement of the work. Vergerio admits there are mistakes of prosody and gaps and errors in the *historia*, but argues that it is still a great work, *if* one considers the author’s youth when he wrote most of it, and *if* one considers the decadence of the age. Vergerio clearly implies that the work is not really up to the standard of Virgil, but believes that the fault lies not with Petrarch but with the times he lived in. This, too, becomes a topos in fifteenth-century discussions of Petrarch’s Latinity.

This more reserved judgment about Petrarch’s literary abilities was apparently shared with other young disciples of Salutati, as we can see from Leonardo Bruni’s *Dialogi ad Petrum Histrum*, which was in fact dedicated to Vergerio.¹⁸ The *Dialogi* are the best evidence we have for the reasons behind Petrarch’s loss of standing as a Latin writer in the first decade of the Quattrocento. The speeches of Bruni’s interlocutors reveal that Petrarch’s reputation had suffered in the change of generations around 1400. Salutati, the aged and honored chancellor of Florence, representing the last generation of Petrarch’s disciples, is depicted as a revered but somewhat overbearing figure who is deeply shocked by his young disciples’ lack of respect for the Three Crowns of Florence. The younger generation – represented by Bruni and Niccolò Niccoli – make fun of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio as mere popular poets, read by woolworkers, bakers and the like.

They sneer at their fame, which depends on the opinion of unqualified judges. The *Africa*, after decades of advance publicity, turned out to be a ridiculous failure: *parturient montes, nascetur ridiculus mus*. Petrarch's *Bucolicon carmen* was unbucolic, his orations unoratorical.¹⁹ In the second book of the *Dialogues*, an irate Salutati forces Niccoli to take back his harsh remarks, but Niccoli's recantation is deeply insincere. He quotes back to Salutati, in ironically altered form, Salutati's own dictum that Petrarch was superior to Cicero in verse and to Virgil in prose.²⁰ Niccoli says he far prefers an oration of Petrarch's to all the epistles of Virgil, and the poems of Petrarch to all the poems of Cicero. Of course the members of Salutati's circle would understand, as outsiders might not, that the epistles circulating under Virgil's names were medieval fakes and that Cicero's verse – of which only a few fragments survived – were regarded as laughable specimens of the poetic art already in antiquity.

The dialogues suggest clearly the emotional, cultural and even political chasm that had opened up between the two generations of humanists. The older generation – Boccaccio, Salutati, Luigi Marsili, Filippo Villani – had known Petrarch personally and had experienced his charm, or they knew people who had. He was a key figure for them in discovering their own vocation as scholars. They admired the seriousness of his Christian beliefs and took pride in him as a fellow Florentine. They imitated his ornate and high-flown diction. They genuinely believed that, if wisdom was placed on the scale with stylistic elegance, Petrarch deserved to rank with the ancients. He was a Christian, and that in itself gave him sufficiently superior wisdom to tip the balance in his favor in any comparison with the ancients.²¹

The younger generation – especially Niccoli, Bruni and Poggio – necessarily took a different attitude, an attitude of uncompromising classicism. Their loyalties were with the ancients; with the beloved Latin language that was their claim to superiority and their ticket to success. They were proud of their knowledge of Greek, which previous generations had lacked. As first or second-generation immigrants from the *contado*, they had little attachment to the native Florentine literary tradition. They were all of them indifferent to religion. They found Petrarch's style (and that of his imitators) florid, garrulous, overly pious and overly emotional. As products of the 'first Ciceronianism' popularized by Giovanni Malpaghini da Ravenna, they themselves adored above all the wit and sophistication of Cicero's dialogues and familiar letters; they themselves aimed at a spare, balanced, elegant Latin style.

The stylistic contrast between the generations that began to make itself felt around 1400 would be too trivial to notice if it was not a sign of deeper changes in the role of the classics in Italian education and culture. One key issue separating the generations was the question of how important Christianity should be in determining membership in the Latin canon. Salutati's position, argued with fanatical senile logic in a letter to Poggio, was that Christianity was more important than anything else. Bruni and Poggio had complained that Salutati, absurdly, had rated Petrarch above Cicero in eloquence. Salutati's response was to ask: well, what, after all, *was* eloquence? Surely it consisted both of *res* and *verba*: the truth well said. And of the two elements, *res* was surely the more important. Style without truth was empty, while wisdom gave force even to uncultivated speech, such as Socrates' speech in the *Apology* or the sermons of Franciscan preachers. Cicero had been a skeptic, doubting everything; therefore, for all

his eloquence, what he said was, in the end, empty. Petrarch, as a Christian, was in possession of the truth; *eo ipso* his *sermo* was superior to the ancients, whatever the charms of their *ornatus verborum*. Hence Petrarch belonged among the greatest writers of Latin. Moreover, Salutati claimed, the historical period in which one writes is fundamentally irrelevant to one's excellence as a writer. The young classicists' rule that earlier automatically meant better was foolish and could be contradicted by innumerable examples. Any age could produce good writers.²²

The younger generation rejected this position utterly. The opposing positions – that truth without eloquence was useless, that antiquity was the canon of excellence, that good Latin could only be written in Golden Ages – became commonplaces of Bruni's and Poggio's generation, and ultimately of the humanist movement in general. Salutati's Augustinian insistence that eloquence was dependent on truth was simply reversed by the younger generation, who proclaimed that truth without eloquence was mute. Men who knew the truth but could not communicate it well had no social value. To acquire eloquence, one had to learn from the best writers, pagan or Christian. And it had to be admitted that the best writers were pagans. Christian educators should not be alarmed by this. For it was possible to make a distinction, even a radical one, between eloquence and religious belief. One did not have to be a Christian to write well, and being a Christian did not automatically confer eloquence. Authors should be admitted to the canon if and only if they were eloquent. Of course they should also be morally unobjectionable; that went without saying; but the primary criterion of acceptance to the canon should be linguistic purity and verbal power.

In saying this, Bruni and Poggio were embracing a new idea of canonicity in sharp contrast with the understanding of canonicity that had obtained in the medieval period. In the Middle Ages, in order to be an *auctor*, one had to have written a useful work, and one had to be dead. A useful work was defined as one that was either learned, in the sense of containing useful *doctrina*, or elegant, in the rather naïve sense of containing a great store of vocabulary and rhetorical figures. Thus in the course of the Middle Ages, the lists of *auctores* suitable for use in schools get longer and longer. Alcuin recommends twelve, including four pagans; in the first half of the twelfth century Conrad of Hirsau lists 21 authors; Eberhard the German in the first half of the thirteenth century lists about 40; and Hugo of Trimberg in 1280 lists over 80 *auctores*.²³ Included are authors of all periods from the Roman republic down to Hugo's own time, and authors in every branch of the arts and sciences. Eberhard in the *Laborintus*, in addition to the classical authors Virgil, Homer (in the *Ilias Latina*), Horace and Juvenal, lists numerous other authors and works less familiar to classical ears: Maximianus (the sixth-century Christian Latin poet), Walter of Châtillon's *Alexandreis*, the *Doctrinale* of Alexander Villadei, the *Poetria nova* of Geoffrey of Vinsauf, Bernard Silvestris, Aemilius Macer on herbs, Marbod of Rennes on gems, and so forth. Generally speaking, the only criterion ever given for exclusion of an author from a medieval canon is heterodoxy or immorality, and even that criterion seems to have been widely flouted. There is never, to my knowledge, any suggestion that an author should be excluded on grounds of period, usage, or linguistic impropriety.

With the educational treatises of the early '400 humanists, however, we see a remarkable change.²⁴ First, the sheer number of *auctores* is sharply reduced. Whereas

Hugo of Trimberg had listed over 80 authorities in 1280, the humanist educators give us canons of between one and two dozen authors. Second, whereas the majority of *auctores* in the medieval canons are Christian (though the pagans are still strongly represented), the humanist canons of the quattrocento are predominantly pagan. The backbone of the humanist curriculum consists of pagan poets, orators, comic writers, historians and moral philosophers. Of the few Christian writers admitted the latest is Boethius. Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini also allows that some recent authors – Bruni, Guarino and Traversari are mentioned – wrote works that ‘tersa sunt legentibusque frugifera’, but this is almost an afterthought. Petrarch’s Latin works are pointedly ignored. With the sole exception of Alexander of Villadei (whom Battista Guarino grudgingly admits is useful for teaching grammar, as his rhymes are based on Priscian), every single medieval Christian author, every one of the *auctores minores*, has been excluded from the humanist canon. As Bruni explained in the *De studiis et literis* and in his *Life of Petrarch*, there are good periods and bad periods in literature, and the medieval period was a bad one. Reading badly-written books simply corrupts one’s own style, as putting bad food in one’s stomach corrupts one’s health. Finally, the humanist canons diverge from the medieval ones by insisting that the primary criteria for inclusion and exclusion are linguistic purity, elegance, and rhetorical power. Medieval works are bad because they are held to be ignorant of grammar, barbarous, garrulous, florid, disorderly, cacophonous, trifling and mean. The writings of classical authors are good because they are weighty, serious, and truthful; because they have clarity, propriety, elegance and splendor in the use of words; because they have a firm structure and flow in graceful, harmonious rhythms, both in prose and verse.

As we now know from the researches of Anthony Grafton, Lisa Jardine and Robert Black, there is often a wide gap between the recommendations of theoretical treatises and the actual practice of humanist schools.²⁵ But we are dealing here with aspirations, beliefs and prejudices rather than schoolroom realities, and to these the educational treatises, letters, dialogues and other prescriptive writings of the early humanists constitute our best guides. The new, more secular generation of humanists who came to maturity in the first decades of the fifteenth century – the generation that had lived through the disillusioning last stages of the Great Schism – had a much stronger sense of their own discontinuity with the great period of Latin literature than even Petrarch and Salutati had manifested. They showed a dissatisfaction with medieval eloquence and a longing for the classical which sprang from a broader loss of faith in medieval civilization. As Silvia Rizzo has shown, the belief that Latin was a living but artificial language, founded consciously by *auctores* and grammarians as an idealized form of communication, gave writers like Petrarch, Salutati, Bruni and Valla the confidence to believe that they could themselves master the art of Latin eloquence.²⁶

But with the beginning of the Quattrocento, we see a growing sense of the difficulty of that task, a growing sense that the great figures of the Florentine past had not achieved true eloquence. Even before Biondo Flavio in the 1430s made it clear to most humanists that Latin had in fact been a natural language in classical times, men like Bruni and Niccoli had begun to realize the obstacles in the path of acquiring true, antique eloquence; they had come to regard Petrarch's attempt to storm the citadel of Latin eloquence by sheer force of will as a bit naïve. For Niccoli in the *Dialogues*, the problem lay in the loss of ancient books. The patrimony of ancient learning had been lost through

the fault of ‘the times’, ‘in hac faece temporum atque in hac tanta librorum desideratione’ – code, probably, for the destruction wrought by the prejudices of early Christian extremists.²⁷ How could one have a Renaissance of antiquity amid such a dearth of books? For Bruni the problem was rather the moral corruption of the times, the lack of great men and the opportunities for greatness, the failure of Florentine history to come up to Roman and Livian standards.²⁸ Bruni equally lamented the ignorance of Greek, which had stood behind the achievement of the ancient Latin authors. Both men in due course overcame their despair. Niccoli did so by becoming one of the greatest book-collectors of all time; Bruni by becoming the historian of Florence, praising the great deeds of the Florentines in peace and war, and the premier translator of Greek of his day.

From the summit of that achievement two decades later, the mature Bruni could look back on the Latin writings of Petrarch with new and gentler eyes. Thanks to the humanist educators, the world was becoming full of young men who could read Greek and write like Cicero. Perhaps after all Petrarch had not been an isolated failure. Perhaps, instead, he had been the start of something, of a movement to create a new Latin literature that would overtop the Tuscan classics of the Trecento, of a movement that could genuinely compete with the ancients on their own terms. That, at any rate, was the position Bruni adopted when he came to write his *Life of Petrarch* in 1436. As a writer of Latin, Petrarch could not be compared to the ancients. But he had thrown open the gate; the fame he had won, the progress he had made, had encouraged others to go further down the same path. As we have seen, this became the standard judgement of fifteenth century humanism on Petrarch’s achievement.

All of which goes to show that there are more ways of achieving immortality than getting into the canon. In whatever temple of Fame he dwells amid the Elysian fields, Petrarch has never, to be sure, had the satisfaction of seeing his Latin works dismembered by countless schoolmasters and cursed by countless schoolboys. The generation of Bruni, Niccoli and Poggio made sure of that. But in return they cast him in an historical role in which he may well, in the end, outlast even Latin grammar itself: the role of Father of the Renaissance.

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Summary: Petrarch quickly became a canonical author in Italian, but as a Latin author he lost his nascent canonical status in Renaissance Italy around 1400. This was the result of a new generation of humanists with less loyalty to the memory of their predecessors, and more deeply the result of a change in the idea of what it meant to be a canonical author. The later biographical tradition of Petrarch (after 1400) prefers to honor Petrarch as a pioneer in the movement to recover good Latin style rather than as a model to be imitated by contemporary Latinists.

Appendix

The Circulation of Petrarch's Latin and Italian Works

Inside and Outside Italy

TABLE 1: DATE AND ORIGIN OF SURVIVING PETRARCH MANUSCRIPTS IN BELGIUM, THE CZECH AND SLOVAK REPUBLICS, FRANCE, GERMANY, SPAIN, SWITZERLAND, THE UNITED STATES, THE UNITED KINGDOM, TRIESTE, FLORENCE AND THE VATICAN.

<i>Latin Works</i>	<i>Italian Origin</i>	<i>Non-Italian Origin</i>
s. XIV – XV in.	150	36
s. XV	117	353
s. XV ex. – XVI	8	22
<i>Italian Works</i>		
s. XIV – XV in.	19	0
s. XV	232	3
s. XV ex. - XVI	27	16

Source: Marco Vattasso, *I codici petrarcheschi della Biblioteca Vaticana* (Rome 1908); the twelve volumes of the *Censimento di codici petrarcheschi*; and Michele Feo, ed., *Codici latini del Petrarca nelle biblioteche fiorentine* (Florence 1991).²⁹ Manuscripts of Italian origin are underrepresented in this sample as the libraries of the Vatican, Florence and Trieste represent only an estimated 40% of the total holdings of Renaissance manuscripts in Italian libraries, whereas the figures for non-Italian libraries represent perhaps 80% of the total.³⁰ But a multiple regression analysis would not substantially affect the generalizations stated in the body of the article, especially as Petrarch's Latin works are likely *a priori* to be overrepresented in Florentine libraries. For the fifteenth century, for example, there would still be between two and three times as many manuscripts of non-Italian origin containing Latin works of Petrarch than there would be of his Latin works written in Italy.

TABLE 2. INCUNABULAR EDITIONS OF PETRARCH'S WORKS³¹

	Italy	Outside Italy
<i>Latin Opera Omnia</i>		
	1	0
		1

Single Latin Works

25	8	17
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Vernacular Works

32	32	0
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*Vernacular Translations of
the Griselda Tale from
Petrarch's Latin*

19	0	19
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*Albanzani's Italian translation
of the De viris illustribus*

1	0
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Source: The Illustrated Incunabula Short-Title Catalogue on CD-ROM, Reading, England and Woodbridge, Connecticut: Primary Source Media in association with the British Library, 1997.

TABLE 3. EDITIONS OF PETRARCH PRINTED BETWEEN 1500 AND 1600

	Italy	Outside Italy
<i>Vernacular Works</i>		
147	137	10
	(Venice: 114)	(Lyon: 9)
<i>Latin Opera Omnia</i>		
4	2	2
<i>Collected Works (nine)</i>		
1	1	

Single Latin Works

40	8	32
De remediis – 19	3	16
Penitential Psalms – 8	1	7
Bucolica – 6	2	4
De vita solitaria – 3	0	3
Africa – 2 ³²	1	1
Secret – 2	1	1

Translations of Italian Works

French – 10

Trionfi – 8

Rime – 1

Opere volgari – 1

Spanish – 10

Triumphs - 8

Rime – 2

German – 1

Trionfi - 1

English – 1

Trionfi - 1

Translations of Latin Works

German – 12

De remediis - 10

Rerum memorabilium libri - 2

Spanish - 10

De remediis - 9

De vita solitaria – 1

Italian - 4

De remediis – 3

Africa – 1 (bilingual)

French - 3

De remediis – 3

Czech – 1

De remediis - 1

Source: OCLC (Online Computer Library Center) First Search – WorldCat (on-line database of approximately 41,555 participating libraries).

¹ See especially his *Familiars* IV.7, in Francesco PETRARCA, *Prose*, ed. G. Martellotti, P. G. Ricci, E. Carrara and E. Bianchi, Milano—Napoli 1955, 848.

² See Appendix.

³ Nicholas MANN, *Petrarch's Role as a Moralist in Fifteenth-Century France*, in *Humanism in France at the End of the Middle Ages and in the Early Renaissance*, ed. A. H. T. LEVI, Manchester 1970, 6-28.

⁴ SOTTILI (cited in note 29, below) lists 12 manuscripts of Damian's *De ordine eremitarum* that circulated under Petrarch's name.

⁵ See Appendix.

⁶ Silvia RIZZO, *Ricerche sul latino umanistico*, I, Roma 2002, 29-73.

⁷ Cited in the Appendix.

⁸ Private communication from Virginia Brown. For the *Africa* see Vincenzo FERA, *Antichi editori e lettori dell' Africa*, Messina 1984, 13-14.

⁹ J. HANKINS, *Repertorium Brunianum: A Critical Guide to the Writings of Leonardo Bruni*, I, Roma 1997.

¹⁰ D. JAVITCH, *Proclaiming a Classic: The Canonization of Orlando Furioso*, Princeton 1991, 3-9.

¹¹ FERA, *Antichi editori*.

¹² *El secreto di messer Francesco Petrarca*, Siena: Simeone di Niccolò, 1517. The translation was reprinted by Zoppino in Venice in 1520. After that date, no more Italian

translations of the Latin Petrarch were published before the second half of the sixteenth century.

¹³ *Censimento dei codici dell'Epistolario di Leonardo Bruni*, ed. Lucia GUALDO ROSA, 2 vols., Roma 1993-2004; HANKINS, *Repertorium Brunianum*; idem, *Humanism in the Vernacular: The Case of Leonardo Bruni*, in *Humanism and Creativity in the Renaissance: Essays in Honor of Ronald G. Witt*, ed. Christopher S. CELENZA and Kenneth GOUWENS, Leiden 2006, 11-29.

¹⁴ Petrarch's early biographies are collected in A. SOLERTI, ed., *Le vite di Dante, Petrarca e Boccaccio*, Milano 1904-1905. See also Salutati's *libellus* on his death in his *Epistolario*, ed. F. Novati, Roma 1891-1911, rpt. Torino 1966, I, 201, 223-228 = epp. 3.18, 3.25.

¹⁵ In fact, Manetti rather carefully says that Petrarch 'presented himself' to posterity as a literary model in both prose and verse; Giannozzo MANETTI, *Biographical Writings*, ed. S. U. Baldassarri and R. Bagemihl, Cambridge (Massachusetts) 2003, 66: 'Et suo quodam excellentiori dicendi genere seipsum posteris in soluta oratione et carmine ad imitandum praestitit, quod nulli alio usque ad tempora sua contigisse legimus ut in utroque dicendi genere praevaleret.' Manetti goes on to repeat the standard *topos* that only Petrarch excelled both in prose and in verse, something none of the ancient writers did, but he carefully avoids saying that any single one of Petrarch's writings in prose or verse equalled those of any single ancient prose writer or poet.

¹⁶ Sicco POLENTON, *Scriptorum illustrium latinae linguae libri XVIII*, ed. B. L. Ullman, Roma 1928, 138-139, is apologetic about praising Petrarch: 'Neque vero id negant qui fateri quae sunt vera non verentur, ipsum esse illum qui et princeps et auctor fuit

excitandi studii et poetrii et omnis eloquentiae, ut quae per diu neglecta fuerant et quasi sopita dormierant, ea tandem mortalium ad cognitionem usumque redirent. Gratus tamen illorum gustui non solet esse qui sunt adeo delicati ut nihil omni parte non perfectum laudent; sed meminerent Ciceronis esse in *Bruto* dictum, nihil simul et inventum et perfectum esse. Atque illud constat, quod, etsi non adaequandus Ciceroni nec Virgilio videatur, id tamen est suo ingenio ac diligentia assecutus, quod istis in studiis et sui et superioris temporis omnes ad multos annos quovis dicendi in genere superavit.’ As an afterthought he mentions Petrarch’s Italian works: ‘Patria quoque lingua, quo in genere plurimum valuit, ut pretermittam nihil, amatorias cantilenas ac libros sonetorum et Triumphorum fecit.’ For Sicco’s admiring relationship with Bruni, see now the documentation assembled in my Appendix II to GUALDO ROSA’s *Censimento*, cit., II, 364-370. The topos that Petrarch opens paths for humanists coming after him goes back at least to BOCCACCIO; see his *Opere latini minori*, ed. A. F. Massèra, Bari 1928, 195 (a. 1372). But as Baron points out (*Crisis*, I, 237-38, cited below), Boccaccio is referring specifically to the revival of Latin poetry and he still believes that Petrarch has equalled the poetic achievement of the ancient Latin poets.

¹⁷ Paolo CORTESI, *De hominibus doctis*, ed. M. T. Graziosi, Roma 1973.

¹⁸ Leonardo BRUNI, *Dialogi ad Petrum Histurum*, ed. S. U. Baldassarri, Florence 1994.

The classic account of the Florentine reception of Petrarca in the later Trecento and early Quattrocento is in Hans BARON, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols., Princeton 1955, 226-240.

¹⁹ Cino Rinuccini reports that the Niccoli-Bruni circle regarded Petrarch’s *De viris illustribus* as ‘un zibaldone da quaresima.’ See the *Invettiva contro a certi calunniatori di*

Dante, Petrarca e Boccaccio in Antonio LANZA, *Polemiche e berte letterarie nella Firenze del primo Quattrocento*, Roma 1971, 261-67, at 264.

²⁰ See RIZZO, *Ricerche*, 63-65, for the favorable comparisons in Salutati's circle of Petrarch's Latin verse to Virgil's and his prose to Cicero's. Prof. Rizzo points out to me, in addition, that the letter of Francesco Nelli to Petrarch making this comparison (ibid., 64) was repeated by Boccaccio, as appears from *Sen.* 17.1, where Petrarch quotes Boccaccio's words as follows: 'Dicis enim et consulis ut satis michi sit – tuis ad literam utor verbis – carmine forsan equasse Virgilium, soluto Tullium stilo; quod o si veritate inductus et non amore seductus assereres!'

²¹ See SALUTATI, *Epistolario*, IV, 130-145 = ep. 14.19.

²² ibid. Salutati accuses Poggio of hiding his impiety behind a reverence for antiquity, and argues that in a pure contest of knowledge between the ages of Christianity and antiquity, Christianity was not inferior to antiquity: 'Quod si feceris, crede mihi, non eris aetatis tue tam iniquus et improbus aestimator.'

²³ Gunter GLAUCHE, *Schullectüre im Mittelalter. Entstehung und Wandlungen d. Lektürekansons bis 1200 nach d. Quellen dargestellt*, München 1970; Edmond Faral, *Les artes poétiques du XIIe et du XIII siècle: recherches et documents sur la technique littéraire du moyen âge*, Paris 1924, rpt. Geneva 1982; Hugo VON TRIMBERG, *Das 'Registrum multorum auctorum': Untersuchungen und kommentierte Textausgabe*, ed. Karl Langosch, Berlin 1942. For the general issue of canon formation in early humanism, see Christopher S. CELENZA, *Creating Canons in Fifteenth Century Ferrara: Angelo Decembrio's De politia litteraria* 1.10, "Renaissance Quarterly", LVII, 2004, 43-98.

²⁴ *Humanist Educational Treatises*, ed. and tr. Craig KALLENDORF, Cambridge (Massachusetts) 2002, passim.

²⁵ Anthony GRAFTON and Lisa JARDINE, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth Century Europe*, Cambridge (Massachusetts) 1986; Robert BLACK, *Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy: Tradition and Innovation in Latin Schools from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century*, Cambridge 2001.

²⁶ RIZZO, *Ricerche*, 75-85.

²⁷ *Dialogi*, ed. Baldassarri, 243-249.

²⁸ In a letter of 1408 to Niccoli (II.1), explaining why he has been unable to write an oration in praise of the late Salutati, Bruni writes revealingly: ‘Amicus enim ad amicum loquor, id est, ipse ad me, stamina ipsa et fila vesti ob rei ipsius de qua agitur vel ingenii mei, vel utriusque simul, paupertatem mirifice me destituunt, ad id quod exorsus fueram pertexendum, atque ut ego nunc video, et ut tu clamare plerunque soles, nos plane hoc tempore homunculi sumus, quibus et si magnitudo animi non deesset, materia certe deest ad nominis atque gloriae amplificationem. M. Claudium Marcellum Siracusae captum, Nola defensa, Hannibal repulsus et multis secundis proeliis superatus, consulatus, quoque proconsulatus dico, caesus dux hostium et opima Feretro Iovi suspensa spolia, triumphus et ovatio celebrem reddunt. [...] Nos autem hodie, quam in angusto versamur? Quid enim nunc referam aut quid dicam, magistratusne in urbe vel extra urbem gestos? Apud Pecciole, credo, memorabilem editam pugnam aut tu legere poteris absque risu, aut ipse ego, si compos mentis fuero, describere audebo? Contentiones populares nullae sunt, leges perlatae nullae, decreta etiam nulla, mores et humanitas superest dumtaxat, tamen

in illis ipsis, nisi aliqua insignia liberalitatis, humanitatis, prudentiae ac veritatis constantiae supra consuetudinem egregii ac rari exempli edita facinora extent, satis copiose laudari non possunt. Universi quidem generis laus parum habet momenti, nisi ad singularia descendas. Singularia vero qui admirabilia videri possunt, nisi sint egregia et rara, velut Fabia subventio [...] In iis autem huiusmodi laudandis prius mehercule carta et atramentum mihi deforet quam oratio. Nos vero, quid simile aut par, quid egregium aut admirabile praeter studia et literas? Itaque me in illis iactabo immodice, et tamen cetera diligenter perquiram et colligam, quo prolixitas impleatur.’ In Leonardo BRUNI, *Epistolarum libri VIII*, ed. Lorenzo Mehus, Florentiae 1741, reprint with an introduction by James Hankins, Rome 2007, I, 27-30

[Notes to Hankins - Appendix]

²⁹ Only manuscripts containing complete works or substantial portions thereof have been included. Manuscripts containing single letters, single verses, excerpts, pseudo-Petrarchan writings, translations of Petrarch’s works into other languages, and commentaries on Petrarch’s works have not been counted. The volumes in the *Censimento* are as follows:

E. PELLEGRIN, *Manuscripts de Pétrarque dans le bibliothèques de France* Padova 1966.

O. BESOMI, *Codici petrarcheschi nelle biblioteche svizzere*, Padova 1967.

A. SOTTILI, *I codici del Petrarca nella Germania occidentale*, Padova 1971.

E. PELLEGRIN, *Manuscripts de Pétrarque à la Bibliothèque Vaticane. Supplément au catalogue de Vattasso*, Padova 1976.

N. MANN, *Petrarch manuscripts in the British Isles*, Padova 1975.

S. ZAMPONI, *I manoscritti petrarcheschi della Biblioteca Civica di Trieste: Storia e catalogo*, Padova 1984.

D. DUTSCHKE, *Census of Petrarch Manuscripts in the United States*, Padova 1986.

G. TOURNOY, *I codici del Petrarca nel Belgio*, Padova 1988.

M. VILLÁR, *Códices petrarquescos en España*, Padova 1995.

E. RAUNER, *Petrarca-Handschriften in Tschechien und in der Slowakischen Republik*, Padova 1999.

³⁰ The percentages are based on the parallel case of Leonardo Bruni, another author with an international reputation, for whom we have a complete census (see note 4, above). The manuscripts from Florence, Trieste and the Vatican make up approximately 40% of the *Iter Italicum* of P. O. KRISTELLER, 7 vols., Leiden-London 1961-1997.

³¹ In Tables 2 and 3, pseudonymous works and imprints such as anthologies that contain only excerpts from complete works of Petrarch have not been counted. It must of course be taken into account that Venice printings in particular were intended for a European market as well as the primary Italian market.

³² A third printing of the *Africa* (OCLC 37938604) has no indication of place of printing, is dated only approximately to 1501-03, is attested in only one library in this form, so is probably an extract from a larger volume.